CONFERENCE ON DISARMAMENT

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22 June 1993

FINAL RECORD OF THE SIX HUNDRED AND FIFTY-FIFTH PLENARY MEETING

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva,
on Tuesday, 22 June 1993, at 10 a.m.

President: Mrs. Magda Bauta Solés (Cuba)

GE.93-61316 (E)

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I have pleasure in declaring open the 655th plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament.

As it takes up the functions of President of the Conference, the delegation of Cuba wishes to inform delegations that, since Ambassador José Pérez Novoa is out of town on an official mission, I will have the honour of replacing him today in keeping with the provisions of rule 10 of the Conference's rules of procedure. It will therefore be for Ambassador Pérez Novoa to make the opening statement for this term as President, to which my country attaches special importance. However, I would like to assure you as of now of his wish to work closely with all delegations. Likewise I wish to express our gratitude to the distinguished representative of China, Ambassador Hou Zhitong, for his outstanding work as President, in which he once again demonstrated his diplomatic experience, intelligence and knowledge of disarmament issues. I have pleasure in extending a warm welcome among us to the new representative of the Russian Federation, Ambassador Grigori Berdennikov, who is participating for the first time in our work. Ambassador Berdennikov is well known in disarmament circles as he has previously participated in the work of the Conference and in other bodies associated with the subjects with which we deal. Ambassador Berdennikov can of course count on the cooperation of my delegation in carrying out his important functions.

I have no speakers on my list for today. As you will probably remember among the measures for the improved and effective functioning of the Conference it was decided last year that, if there were no speakers, it would be possible to cancel the Tuesday plenary meetings. However, we agreed with the secretariat to keep the plenary meeting scheduled for today since the Conference had anyway to hold an informal meeting to consider document CD/1200/Rev.1, which contains a draft statement by the Group of 21 on the total suspension of nuclear tests. If any delegation considers it appropriate to make a statement at the last minute, it will have the possibility of doing so now. Does any delegation wish to take the floor? Since none does, I shall suspend this plenary meeting as several delegations this morning have asked me for it to be resumed after our informal consultations. I will therefore convene immediately the informal meeting scheduled for today. It is understood that, as was stated by the President during the plenary meeting last Thursday, delegations of non-member States that participate in the work of the Conference may, if they so wish, participate in the informal meeting.

The meeting was suspended at 10.15 a.m. and resumed at 10.40 a.m.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): We will now resume the 655th plenary meeting. Would any delegation like to take the floor? I give the floor to the distinguished delegation of Mexico.

Mrs. CARVALHO de PLASA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): Madam President, as this is the first formal meeting in which my delegation has taken the floor under the Cuban presidency, allow me to extend my Government's sincerest congratulations on your new duties, which we are sure you will discharge successfully. You have our confidence, appreciation and cooperation.

(Mrs. Carvalho de Plasa, Mexico)

The Government of Mexico is convinced that the Conference on Disarmament made an excellent start to its work in January. We believe that this points to a potential for progress, a new spirit, new prospects and a brighter future for this forum, and therefore we are now wondering what has happened to the draft statement on a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. Everyone here is sure to wonder whether there is an echo in the Council chamber, because they will imagine that they have already heard these words here before.

We are disappointed but not surprised that we have not managed to adopt what we thought was a simple decision to support a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. A little over three weeks ago, on 3 June, we proposed that the Conference on Disarmament, in its capacity as a corporate body and an autonomous organ of the United Nations, should adopt measures to ensure the success of the negotiations on a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty. Certainly, quite a number of consecutive United Nations resolutions have been adopted on a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty, in 1992 with just one vote against. However, our proposal suggested that the Conference should find some way of supplementing what had already been done in the United Nations. In addition, the complete prohibition of nuclear testing is an item on the agenda of the Conference on Disarmament. It is the first item that the Conference on Disarmament has included on its agenda since its establishment in almost 14 years of existence. We regret that two or three delegations have decided to thwart this modest proposal by resorting to the technique of the pocket veto. What is most disturbing though, is that there are apparent signs that some of the countries represented here really object to a comprehensive nuclear test ban and are obviously frightened of it.

The future of the Conference on Disarmament is in our hands. This body can become more active and gain more interest or wither away. If we seek the former for the future, then we will undoubtedly have to be more action-oriented. The draft statement proposed by the Group of 21 is an example of something action-oriented. This draft statement would not have been binding for anyone. It just set forth what was known to all and encouraged participation by the members of the Conference on Disarmament and the non-member participants in the Conference. After all, a comprehensive nuclear test ban will be successful if it enjoys broad participation.

The Conference on Disarmament is about to end its second session and we have lost an opportunity. We regret that a forum whose members often complain about the lack of progress has not been able to come out clearly in support of action on an issue that is of concern to us all and incumbent on us all.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished representative of Mexico for her kind words and have pleasure in giving the floor on this occasion to the distinguished Ambassador Errera of the delegation of France.

Mr. ERRERA (France) (translated from French): Since we are in formal session, I formally reiterate the congratulations I extended to you a while ago for success in your presidency. I do not wish to enter into a controversy, though this room might derive some benefit from one from time to time. I would simply like to say two things having listened very carefully to

(Mr. Errera, France)

what has just been said by the distinguished representative of Mexico. These two things are the following. First, I note that the delegation of Mexico had little confidence, few illusions as to the outcome of the debates, since it had already prepared a purple passage challenging and criticizing the result obtained. The second point is more bothersome. It is no secret that we are rather keen defenders of the Conference on Disarmament and the central role - that is the word I think I used last week - the central role which the Conference on Disarmament should play in any negotiations, if there are negotiations, and if we take part in them, on a nuclear-test-ban treaty. Consequently I regret the type of criticism which has been levelled at the Western nuclear Powers, since that is how they were implicitly designated, and the "pocket veto" they apparently have. I will not dwell on this matter because a lot could be said about past cases. I will merely say the following. If the Conference on Disarmament is to play a real, effective, central role today in negotiating a nuclear-test-ban treaty, then we must stop using the technique which was current for many years during which the Conference on Disarmament made no progress in any field whatsoever, a technique whereby responsibility was attributed to a certain number of countries. Doing this today will discourage a number of governments from using the Conference on Disarmament to pursue the objective which is close to the heart of so many delegations, that of a test-ban treaty. I am not seeking to create controversy when I say this; I say this seriously because we are at a point, and in a short time we will perhaps be at a point, where important decisions will have to be taken, and these decisions should not be jeopardized by impressions which those who resort to these practices would certainly not wish them to produce.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank Ambassador Errera for his words and I reiterate my appreciation for his greetings to my delegation. I now wish to call on the distinguished Ambassador of the United Kingdom.

Sir Michael WESTON (United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland): Madam President, thank you very much and now since we are in a formal meeting, let me offer you my delegation's congratulations on your assumption of the presidency and assure you of our full cooperation.

I haven't really very much to add to what I said in our informal meeting just now and in our formal meeting last week. However, I would like to echo the remarks of the distinguished representative of France. Quite apart from the substance of this matter, my delegation does, as I have said, sincerely doubt the utility of a statement of this kind. It seems to us to contrast very vividly with the serious and constructive and useful work which we have been doing this year in the Ad Hoc Committee on NTB under Ambassador Tanaka's wise guidance. In the view of my delegation that is the best way to make progress to the eventual aim of a CTBT, an aim which we all share.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): Thank you for your comments and the words addressed to my delegation. I now call on the distinguished delegation of Brazil.

Mr. FELICIO (Brazil): Let me formally welcome the delegation of Cuba to the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

With regard to this proposal made by the Group of 21 of a draft statement contained in document CD/1200/Rev.1 dated 11 June 1993, my delegation would like to state that this proposal is perfectly in line with the resolutions adopted by the United Nations General Assembly and approved there by the vast majority of States parties. That is why my delegation saw no harm and no offence in such a draft proposal that simply urges the States members of the Conference on Disarmament to contribute to the early attainment of a multilateral legal regime on a comprehensive nuclear test ban and reaffirms the responsibilities of this Conference in the negotiation of a comprehensive nuclear-test-ban treaty.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): Many thanks to the delegation of Brazil for its words to my delegation and also its comments. I now call on the distinguished delegation of Mexico.

Mrs CARVALHO de PLASA (Mexico) (translated from Spanish): It is certainly not the intention of my delegation to argue in this plenary meeting with any delegation, but I think it might be useful if I were to make the two clarifications. First of all, my delegation did not just prepare one statement, my delegation prepared three statements - one for the informal meeting to introduce the document, another to express pleasure at the adoption of the statement, because my delegation ardently hoped that this would be the case, and another in case it was not adopted. As my delegation cannot improvise in such cases and prefers to be very careful, that is why my delegation had this in writing. Secondly, the term "pocket veto" can certainly not be attributed to the delegation of Mexico. As the distinguished representative of France knows well, this term has been used here and, in the same context by another delegation.

The PRESIDENT (translated from Spanish): I thank the distinguished representative of Mexico. Does any other delegation wish to take the floor? As none does, and before concluding the 655th meeting of this Conference, perhaps the delegates present here will allow me to make an announcement that has to do with the fact that there will be a meeting of the Contact Group of the Group of 21 on the prevention of an arms race in outer space in room VIII on the third floor at the same time as originally scheduled.

The next plenary meeting of the Conference on Disarmament will be held on 24 June at 10 a.m.

The meeting rose at 10.55 a.m.